Ruhl rules SOD season opener at Hartford

Photo courtesy of TW Photographics

By T.J. Buffenbarger

Hartford, MI – (Friday May 20, 2016) – Ryan Ruhl kicked off the 2016 Engine Pro Sprints on Dirt presented by ARP season with a spectacular, rim riding display in route to a dominating feature win Friday night at Hartford Motor Speedway. Ruhl from Coldwater, Michigan started on the front row and drove away just inches from Hartford's unforgiving concrete wall every lap in route to the victory.

"The car was awesome. I didn't know what to expect with the (new) tires and the track being reconfigured," said Ruhl following the first feature for SOD with its new open rule package with narrower spec tires Hartford's first sprint car race on its widened race track. "We did the same thing we always do and it was pretty close right off the bat. Terry (Stewart) is awesome at getting (the car) to do whatever I tell him."

For Ruhl the dominating victory was a bit of a surprise

considering Hartford's size and utilizing his 360 cubic inch engine against a number of cars with larger power plants.

"Because this track is huge, I figured more motor would help anyone else here. So when we were keeping up with the 410's in hot laps I thought, 'Maybe we've got a shot'."

Dash winner and RockAuto.com SOD Series Rookie of the Year candidate Brian Smith started on the front row for the 20-lap main event. Smith got the jump initially at the start before Ruhl gained momentum through turns one and two to take the lead coming off turn two. Behind Ruhl and Smith Jay Steinebach and Steve Irwin raced for the third spot with Irwin getting a run on Steinebach off turn four on the bottom of the speedway to take away the second position.

Ruhl had motored away to a straightaway lead until encountering a group of slower cars on lap 13. This allowed Smith to close briefly until Ruhl found an opening around the slower cars and motored away. From there it was all Ruhl in dominating fashion lapping up to fourth position. Smith claimed the runner up spot with Irwin, Joe Swanson, and Steinebach rounding out the top five.

Ruhl and Irwin won the heat race events while Smith won the dash.

Engine Pro Sprints on Dirt presented by ARP
Hartford Motor Speedway
Hartford, MI
Friday May 20, 2016

Engine Machine and Tool Heat Race #1 (8 Laps): 1. 16 – Ryan Ruhl, 2. 71H – Brad Lamberson, 3. 10S – Jay Steinebach, 4.2+ – Brian Smith, 5. 46 – Robert Huisken, 6. 7 – Joe Swanson, 7. 8 – Justin Ward, 8. 7X – Nic Rogers. DNS: 19 – Brett Mann. (First 3 finishers transferred to dash)

Lane Automotive Heat Race #2 (8 laps): 1. 0 – Steve Irwin, 2.

1A – Mark Aldrich, 3. 4 – Josh Turner, 4. 19X – Linden Jones, 5. 4 – Craig Karazim, 6. 1 – Eric Smith. DNS: 81 – John Gall, 49T – Gregg Dalman. (First 3 finishers transferred to dash)

Comp Cams Dash (6 Laps): 1. 2+ – Brian Smith, 2. 16 – Ryan Ruhl, 3. 1A – Mark Aldrich, 4. 10S – Jay Steinebach, 5. 46 – Robert Huisken, 6. 0 – Steve Irwin. (Finish determines the first six starting spots in the A-Main)

A-Main (20 Laps): 1. 16 – Ryan Ruhl, 2. 2+ – Brian Smith, 3. 0 – Steve Irwin, 4. 7 – Joe Swanson, 5. 10S – Jay Steinebach, 6. 4T – Josh Turner, 7. 1A – Mark Aldrich, 8. 46 – Robert Huisken, 9. 8 – Justin Ward. 10. 1 – Eric Smith, 11. 19J – Linden Jones. DNS: 7X – Nic Rogers, 49T – Gregg Dalman, 81 – John Gall, 71H – Brad Lamberson, 19 – Brett Mann, 4 – Craig Karazim.

Lap Leaders: Ruhl 1 – 20

Engine Pro Lucky Dog: Josh Turner
KSE Race Products Hard Charger Award: Joe Swanson
Kistler Racing Products contingency awards: Brad Lamberson, Ryan Ruhl
COMP Cams contingency award: Mark Aldrich
BR Motorsports contingency award: Jay Steinebach
Allstar Performance contingency award: Josh Turner
Schoenfeld Headers contingency award: Mark Aldrich
Rod End Supply contingency awards: Ryan Ruhl, Brian Smith, Steve Irwin
Racing Optics contingency award: Joe Swanson
ATL Fuel Cells contingency award: Jay Steinebach
King Racing Products contingency award: Josh Turner
Ti22 Performance contingency award: Brian Smith
DMI contingency award: Brad Lamberson